

## Men and Books

### HISTORY OF THE CANADIAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, 1867-1921\*

H. E. MACDERMOT,

A REVIEW BY W. B. HOWELL,

Montreal

The medical profession of Canada is fortunate in the books which have been written on its history. It owes no small debt of gratitude to M.-J. and George Ahern for their *Notes pour servir à l'histoire de la médecine dans le Bas-Canada*; to W. Canniff who, in his *Medical Profession of Upper Canada* did for Ontario what the Aherns did for the Province of Quebec; to J. J. Heagerty for his *Four Centuries of Medical History in Canada*; and to Dr. Maude E. Abbott for her *History of Medicine in the Province of Quebec*. Now we have another book added to this series: Dr. H. E. MacDermot's recently published *History of the Canadian Medical Association*. Dr. MacDermot's book is more than a history of the Canadian Medical Association; it is, to a considerable extent, a history of the medical profession in Canada from the middle of the 19th century to the present time.

The author traces the origin of the movement which was to result in the formation of the Canadian Medical Association to Dr. Joseph Painchaud and some other Quebec physicians who in 1844 planned a "Medical Fund or Association" for the purpose of affording relief to physicians who were in distress, and after their death to their widows and orphans. Painchaud's scheme was taken up by the medical societies in other parts of Canada. Its charitable purpose dropped out of sight in the desire to form an association in the interests of the profession as a whole. There is no doubt that those interests needed guarding, for Upper and Lower Canada were full of unlicensed practitioners and quacks. This first movement came to nothing, as did another in 1849, owing to the inability of a few to agree and the indifference of the many. It was not until the year of Confederation that the Canadian Medical Association was born, and its birthplace was, suitably enough, the city of Quebec.

From the first the Association concerned itself with matters which were of importance, not only to the medical profession of Canada but to the general public as well. An attempt was made

as early as 1868 to get a bill passed by the Dominion Parliament setting up a general council of medical education and registration for Canada. It was more than forty years afterwards that the bill became a law.

At the first meetings there was much ado about homœopaths. Dr. William Clarke, the president of the Medical Council of Ontario, had difficulty in being elected a member of the Canadian Medical Association. He was suspected of consulting with homœopaths, a crime which he indignantly denied. "I utterly repudiate and abhor them," he said at a meeting shortly after he was elected. On another occasion the delegate from the County of Brant Medical Society said that his society not only refused to admit to its membership anyone who consulted with a homœopath, but also anyone who consulted with anyone who consulted with a homœopath.

In the early 'eighties all but a very few medical men in Canada were general practitioners, and the first attempts at specialism were looked upon with great disfavour. It was even proposed at a meeting of the Association that "specialists should be treated and looked upon as irregular practitioners". The Association, however concerned itself for the most part with subjects more important than homœopaths and specialists. There was, in the early days, as there is today, an earnest sense of responsibility to the people of Canada, and efforts were constantly being made to arouse the government to appreciate the importance of legislation in matters of public health.

The existence of the Association for twenty-five years was precarious. That it did not die was due to a small number of men who were interested in the advance of medical science and looked upon their profession as something more than a means to make a livelihood. They had many difficulties to face, the greatest being the indifference of their colleagues. At the annual meeting in 1891 the attendance was so small that it was proposed to hold the meetings every third year instead of annually. In 1894 there was a notice of motion for the disbanding of the Association. Much credit for tiding it over these bad times was due to successive general secretaries.

The *Journal* of the Association is a continuation of the *Montreal Medical Journal* which was taken over, lock, stock, and barrel, in 1911, and given a new name. Dr. MacDermot pays a well-deserved tribute to the memory of Dr. A. D. Blackader, who in 1919, when over seventy years of age, succeeded Sir Andrew Macphail as editor. In 1921 the Association was reorganized,

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funds were raised by a bond issue, and a permanent general secretary, Dr. T. C. Routley, was appointed. Since then it has flourished exceedingly, not only to the benefit of the medical profession in Canada but to that of the general public.

One of the most interesting chapters in this excellent book is that on "The early medical journals of Canada". Only those who have delved in Canada's medical past can appreciate the great amount of labour this chapter must have cost the author. Much of the difficulty of investigating the life history of journals now extinct is due to the habit they had of changing their names. One of them had six aliases in nine years! Dr. MacDermot quotes freely from the old journals. Some of the quotations are not only instructive but amusing. In early Victorian times editors were less willing than they are now to live and let live. They attacked one another in their editorials with an acrimony to which we are unaccustomed. The *Upper Canada Medical Journal*, for instance, accused Dr. Archibald Hall, editor of the *British American Journal*, of "symptoms of premature decay—symptoms of a melancholy character—whose chief peculiarity is a spirit of frowardness, generally considered pathognomic of cerebral disturbances of approaching dissolution". To which Hall replied that he had "no objection to his young contemporary endeavouring to be witty, but on the contrary was pleased to observe it, as it was a contrast to his usual prosiness". The recriminations of Canadian medical editors

remind one of those described in *Pickwick* as appearing in the columns of the *Eatanswill Gazette* and the *Eatanswill Independent*, the mutual fulminations of Messrs. Slurk and Pott. The editor of the *Medical and Physical Journal*, for instance, was accused by a rival of "clap trap cant".

Dr. MacDermot's book contains a number of charming sketches of prominent Canadian doctors who were living in the middle of the last century, men who had begun their medical careers as apprentices, who knew what it was to operate without anæsthetics and without antiseptics, who knew no pathology or bacteriology, and who had worked through the terrible epidemics of cholera and typhus of the 'thirties and 'forties. They were ignorant of much that the youngest modern graduate in medicine knows, but what knowledge they had they applied to the best advantage. They had wide experience of disease, they understood their patients, and they knew how medicine should be practised.

Dr. MacDermot has made a valuable contribution to Canadian literature. Text-books are soon out of date and thrown away, but a reliable history becomes more and more interesting as time goes on. Future students of Canadian medical history will have cause to bless the name of MacDermot for providing them with a reference book which is completely reliable.

It only remains to say that this book is illustrated with some excellent photographs.

## Association Notes

### Proceedings of the Executive Committee on October 31, 1935

#### *Continued*

#### FEDERATION

The General Secretary gave a brief outline of the trip across Canada recently made by the President and himself. With regard to the question of federation, the following information was given to the Executive Committee:—

#### *Nova Scotia*

Adopted a resolution, unanimously (as far as one could tell), favouring the proposal that the Association become the Canadian Medical Association, Nova Scotia Division.

Instructed that a strong committee be empowered to study the matter during the coming year; and

Accepted a notice of motion respecting By-Laws by which a consummation of federation may be had at the next annual meeting if the final report of the Committee is favourable and acceptable to the meeting.

#### *Prince Edward Island*

Action the same as Nova Scotia.

#### *New Brunswick*

Action the same as Nova Scotia.

#### *Ontario*

In Ontario, the proposal was endorsed in principle last year by the Board of Directors of the Ontario Medical Association and also at two largely attended meetings in Ottawa and Hamilton. The question will be fully gone into by the O.M.A. during the current year.

#### *Manitoba*

Endorsed in principle the proposal to become the C.M.A., Manitoba Division.

Instructed the incoming Executive Committee to study and report upon the proposal; and

Accepted Notice of Motion which would permit the Association to complete Federation at the next annual meeting, provided the report of the Executive Committee was favourable and acceptable to the Association.